# My Pocket Beryl

By

Mary Josephine Benson

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# My Pocket Beryl

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# My Pocket Beryl

BY

Mary Josephine Benson

For, piece by piece and part by part,
It is the crystal-gazer's art
To find Arcana's chambered heart.

Within my beryl the signs rehearse
Faint murmurings from the Universe
In runes that animate my verse.

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# Lyrical

## THE KNIGHT OF THE BELT OF HAIR

And Eleanore for a token to Nigel cut off the locks of her yellow hair and plaited them into a belt with golden clasps.

—*Old Tale.*

I am girt with a cascade of light, with hearts of lilies,
With yellow hair beyond all gold for shining.
My young Love's face in the midst was a flashing jewel,
Her shoulders were pearls between the parted splendor
That wavered whilst her steady eyes caressed me.

My lady has shorn her head to plait my favour!
My Love, most fair, has sacrificed her glory!
A Queen has uncrowned her brow to weave this token!
Stream, holiest light, where hair shone on her pillow,
Lavish and golden-bright like out-poured treasure.

Saint Eleanore, I have kissed your scented tresses.
I have clasped them like Love's tingling arms about me—
A girdle of might, soft, passionate and lovely,
That binds me like your starry-constant glances.
Haste, Conquest, to my lance. I'll win the guerdon!

## THE HORIZON

The horizon is a straight line that cuts the sky across,
And flat between that line and me the prairie grasses toss,
And here a flower is gypsy-red and there a flower is yellow
And here a cluster-flower is blue that has a tale to tell O.

The yellow spray is at my feet and by it blows the red,
But the frail blue trumpets at my breast are blaring what he said;
Although he said it very low, they're shouting to my heart,
And shouting to that rider far where sky and prairie part

He held me close and rode away—that moving speck is he—
At edge of earth ere yet has drooped the nosegay plucked for me!
The horizon is a straight line *that cuts the world in two*—
For when her love must ride to war, what can a woman do?

## THE INTRUDER

I drank at your eyes and held you the beaker
Of mine as you prayed, my spirit-seeker;
And Joy foamed high as Mount Romance
Till over your shoulder I caught the glance
Of Time with his blade—who cut the trance.

Ah, swift as the burst of our Love's aurora,
He gloomed in the midst of the shining aura,
The Shadow, forelocked, toothless, grim—
A devil betwixt the cherubim—
That prayed us pause and drink with him!

## SONG OF THE MIRE

Can the flag grow up without mire?
I am mire!
What were the iris, silken and plush,
Pencilled and tufted and leaved as lush
As its neighbour, the brown becrowned bulrush,
Were I not the hideous mire?
I am mire!

Can the flag grow up without mire?
I am mire!
Lilies of Egypt, lilies of France,
Lilies of Isles that wait perchance
A discoverer yet, could your state entrance
Were it not that I am the mire?
I am mire!

Can the flag grow up without mire?
I am mire!
To beauty I give both hold and suck;
Of beauty I'm life. Let them call me muck,
But the iris floats on the marsh's truck
Of green, and beneath is the mire.
I'm the mire!

Can the flag grow up without mire?
I'm the mire.
No orchid rare of the jungle deep
Where jewelled eyes of serpents keep

Perpetual watch though hunters sleep
Is rarer than flags of mire.
I am mire.

Can the flag grow up without mire?
I am mire.
Fantastic glories of gold and blue
And purple—what marvels of form and hue,
What matter, what spirit, what breath of dew,
A-root in the hideous mire!
I'm the mire.

## THE EMBROIDERER

I have made me a cloth for my delight
That glows with three-score colours bright:
Hues that I snared with a filament
And fixed to fashion my intent.
So, flower-petal and peacock-feather
Shimmer and flow in the floss together,
And here where the tracery takes a turn
The gems of Ind in a passion burn.
I borrowed the boss of a beetle's back
For a cluster here, and this drifting track
Of sparks I caught from a torch's flare—
They never go out in the 'broidery there!
And the reds that you see in the corner shine
I found deep down in a cup of wine;
And here you will guess an you are wise
Is the crest of a bird of paradise.
Yes, a river-bud with a fluted leaf
I enchanted to make this tall motif.

See when I give it a little shake
The riot the wavering colours make.
Of silk-worm floss and a cunning wit
And a needle small have I gladdened it!

If I were a mermaid clad in scales
I'd spread my fins like Fancy's sails
And making a dart of my joined hands, so,
Down in the green deep swift I'd go—
So swift that the water would flow in streaks
As it chortled along my laughing cheeks
And back would brush my enveloping hair,
A-stream as it blew in the upper air.
I would challenge a dolphin friend of mine
To a race like a gale through the tranquil brine
Till it fumed in our wake like the rim of the rocks
Where the Siren, combing her red-brown locks,
Lures on the sailor with dulcet guile
To wreck his bark on her haunted isle.

I would choose a day that was fit for fun
When the air was bright with a flood of sun
So clear I could lie on a coral bed
And watch through the crystal high o'erhead
The seabirds swimming in vaulted sky,
Careening, veering and sweeping by,
And bulks go over—the hulls of ships—
That the scene would suffer each brief eclipse
As fields are dark when a cloudy fleet
Sails inland over the sun-gold wheat.
The denizens of the sea would stare
And wheel, each one for his watery lair;

But I would bridle a white sea-horse
And mount up, up, in a circling course,
Till I galloped beside some speeding ship
And kept the pace of her triumph trip,
Whilst the passengers leaned, frog-eyed to see
A fable appear like reality.
I'd laugh at their scruples and kiss my hand,
And, haply, I'd ride with them back to land.

## THE GLISTERING GUEST

There waits on my threshold a Glistering Guest
Her finger aye on the summons prest
And I, though I ope not, hear the ring
Of her fairy-wild importuning.

Within is the call of the grey goose-wing,
The needle, the cauldron simmering,
The vat that maketh all things white,
That clamour aloud till the dead of night.

But then, with the children soft abed
And the cupboard secure of its golden bread,
With gleaming plates in rows a-shelf
And my chamber sweet as the garden's self,

The muslin slips from my heedless hands
For my Guest on a sudden by me stands—
Though I opened not to her ceaseless ring
She stands beside me glistering!

I look in her eyes and quake with joy
As she bids me gird to her employ:
For they who serve the Glistering Guest
Are glad beyond the fabled Blest.

Oh, many a token of love she brings
In the wondrous wallet beneath her wings,

Inwrought with gems in a runic spell
And 'broidered fair with asphodel.

She gives me the heels of a mountain goat,
Pink vans that into the evening float,
A quill to flout in the eye o' the Sun
And a draught from the wells of Helicon.

Then glides she forth with a strange adieu
Of all tongues blent; and the midnight blue
Receives her form, so strangely hid
By the door no mortal hand undid!

I write, I write, and I glory now,
As the reindeer does in his antlered brow,
In the glad white sheets, close-written, piled
Where the Glistering Guest so lately smiled.

## RELEASED

When I escaped the prison clutch
I tost my cap on high
For joy that it could never touch
The ceiling of the sky.

I cut a sudden caper, too,
So lightsome were my feet,
And sent a pebble pinging through
The quiet cobbled street!

Beyond were ways with ne'er a wall
To let or hinder me,
I might meander over all
Stream-like, or wind-like—free!

The roadside grass ignored the fence,
The path was overgrown;
But trespassed sweetly to my sense
That herbage gypsy-sown.

I flung me down and loved the earth,
The unfettered air, the blue,
And blessed the bondage that gave worth
To liberty so new.

# Contemplative Poems

## THE ISLAND OF FULFILMENT

There is an Island wrapped around with blue
Where all I visioned, highly meant to do,
Has body like the birds and butterflies
That claim no spirit, form and frame for dream,
Hearth-ruddy glory for a pearl-faint gleam,
Splendor that friendly looks me in the eyes.

Within that dripping fringe of murmurous caves,
Pink as the lips of cherubs from the waves
That aye returning, aye enraptured, kiss
The happy shore, are garnered radiant things:
The pictures, songs, the sculptures whose bright wings
Pre-natal stirred but bided natal bliss.

There, as the rose has form terrestrial,
The tale I sensed but could not write, the call,
The haunting urge I loved and far pursued
Baffled, is read by one with shining eyes
And parted lips, a book of Paradise,
Complete, leaf-numbered, glistering and good.

The canvas that my friend with burning heart
Spent passioned colours on, his craving art
Unsatisfied, there in a pillared hall
Sun-girdled, cypress-guarded, rare is hung,

Precious 'mid treasure, largess greatly flung
As God's own hand had flashed along the wall.

And where a jewelled fountain endless plays
A statue lives; its sculptor spent his days
Sketching to sell a roadster, but his nights
Ranging the starry altitudes for flame
Wherewith to kindle marble; his mute name
An angel's trumpet tells the echoing heights.

Within an arbor hallowed like a shrine
A mother sweet as Mary the divine,
Beaming, caresses the desired boy
That Life denied her long expectancy,
Saying, "Nay, childless shalt thou earthly be."
His eyes are lift to hers in raptured joy.

The honeyed fields are strange with wondrous flowers,
The half-formed thoughts of over-crowded hours
The pure in spirit strove for 'mid the moil
That fettered hand and brain erstwhile on earth,
Petalled beatitudes delayed of birth
That firmamental star the Elysian soil.

And, coloured with diviner beams of light
Than stirred old Noah at the dripping sight
Of the first rainbow lifted o'er the flood,
Upheld by choirs that granting form and voice
To song unsung celestially rejoice,
A singing spectrum clasps the charmèd wood.

And ever shining folk with wreathèd brows
People the pathways leading from the House
Set in the Island's midst where One tells o'er
And counts as treasure what each greatly willed,
Each nobly pressed for, what though unfulfilled,
Knocking with effort at His holden door.

With laughter on their lips and in their eyes
The day-beam lustre of supreme surprise
Fulfilment's meads in happy bands they rove
Plucking its scarce-dreamed flowers, its golden sands
They range in converse sweet with joinèd hands
And seek baptismally each waiting grove.

## THE AVENUE OF ELMS

They planted elms in two long rows to-day
Betwixt the High Street and the riverside,
And some stood by who wept and some in pride
Looked tearless on, that voiceless went away.

For to the Fallen rose that aisle of trees
(And you, my Hero-love, among the slain!)
That memory with each year made green again
Might robe afresh within their sacristies.

Oh, Philip, down the Avenue of Elms,
What if some summer night when they are grown,
You should come, conjured when I pace alone
Their shadows, shade-like, from your veilèd realms!

What if within that Hall of Hallowed Dream
Your image should grow substance; arms of flesh—
Your very arms—enfold me; kisses fresh
Supplant ghost-raptures; Death Life's vows redeem?

They planted elms in two long rows to-day
Betwixt the High Street and the riverside.
I thought of you alone of all who died,
Looked blindly on and went my haunted way!

## LOVE, FAME AND THE YOUTH

*Love and Fame Alternately Present their Blandishments*

I give thee a rose," said the maid with the melting eyes,
"And a diadem, I," she orbed like the basilisk.
"My hand shall clasp thy hand when the mountains rise."
"And mine shall beckon thee follow, durst thou risk."

*The Youth Prefers Fame*

The Youth looked long at the young bud dropping dew
And long at the gem aflash in the eye of the sun:
"Perish the flower will, winds its petals strew;
Last will the crown I choose." And the choice was done.

*Love's Gift Survives—Fame's Guerdon Evanesces.*

Love's arm fell sad, then hid the rose in her breast,
Where it *lived!* Oh. Heaven-wrought miracle of trust!
Fame's hand late yielded her guerdon for the crest
Of Youth grown old; and the clutching palm closed—dust!

## DISILLUSIONMENT

(As Arraigned by Mildred.)

Rough hands that stripped the colors from the dawn,
That dried the dewy jewels of the lawn,
That would unspot the leopard an you could,
I do resent you with my hottest blood!

There erst was treasure 'yond the iris-bow,
And Youth made quest to measure allegro.
Who stole the gold and stilled the pipes of Pan,
That I should weep as only Woman can?

I was a maid that would have been a queen
Had King Cophetua more than legend been:
I am a wife without companionship,
Wedded to vows that withered on the lip.

I cherished dreams most fond of home and love.
What dart has slain the emblematic dove
My heart hears yet in this vacuity—
This house where Loneliness has married me?

What was thy guerdon, Disillusionment,
That by thy hand each charmèd veil is rent
That showed Life, shimmering, rosy-hued to Youth—
And hid the drab unkindliness of Truth?

Oh, give me back my dreams, relentless Hand!
"Traitor" I'd scorch thee with the traitor's brand;
But I must plead who hotly would arraign—
"Oh, give me back my golden dreams again!"

## POTENTIALITY VERSUS CIRCUMSTANCE

A seed flung forth from the Sower's hand.
'Twas sweet and full and sound.
It curved and lodged at Fate's command
And fell on stony ground.

The seed felt force of leaf and flower
Bestir within its band;
It swelled and burst its shard in power
And took root in the land.

But lamellated rock lay hard
Beneath the surface mould;
The rootlets from their course debarred
Pushed strong to get a hold.

They strove and dwarfed themselves in vain.
The tender leaves above
Put forth in hope to wind and rain,
But withered ere they throve.

The earth distressed that should have been
Their comfortable bed;
The sun was torture that their green
Grew mortal sere instead.

The other seeds the Sower flung
Bore whole cascades of flowers,

A-drip with honey-dews and sung
By gay bee troubadours.
This was the fittest seed that flew
To earth from out his hand—
This that encountered rock, that grew
To perish in the land.

## IN THE NIGHT WATCHES.

A king considers kingly state
Under an Eastern sky;
Against his foot-stool, singing late,
His knave doth sleeping lie.

Sceptre and crown and gilded throne
Hath David swift forgot,
The drooping boy and skies alone
Are lovely in his thought.

Only the echo of a harp
Has worth beneath the stars
To David, pierced with pangs more sharp
And deep than all his wars.

David, the lust-soiled Victor-King,
Erst shepherd pure as brave—
The glowing youth of stone-and-sling—
Is envying his slave.

## ON WATTS' "LOVE TRIUMPHANT"

Oh, who is this like a victor lithe
That rears from a figure prone?
Nay, two lie low; but He-with-the-Scythe
And the Woman are but one.

For the Woman is dead by the trackless sea,
On the rocks 'neath a waste of sky,
And the Man-with-the-Scythe is Death; and he
And the Woman prostrate lie.

Oh, wedded are He-of-the-Scythe and She
And his hand her cold hand locks;
Her brow is kissed by the winds that be
And his is pressed by rocks.

But who is this that calls amain
Tip-toe with upstretched hands,
To mightiest God between these twain
That like a victor stands?

Oh, who is this stepped forth in light
Where Death and his pale bride lay
That cloy his feet in his naked might
Like a garment cast away?

Oh, He-of-the-Scythe and She are Death;
But the victor towered above,
That flamed into life at their passing breath—
This triumphing Form is Love!

## HOLY WRIT

Her task is done, on her apron white
Her hands are folded meet,
On her brow uplift to the casement's light
The look is far and sweet.

The window's light is a glimmering square
With a village street below.
Is the gleam on her hair of the lamp lit there,
Or the sunset's afterglow?

Oh, finer than village lamp the beams
Of the tender aureole
That crowns the temples of her who dreams
With hushed and vibrant soul!

Oh, fainter than glow of the vanished sun
This hovering pallid ring
Of grace that illumines this silent one
Like a blessed and holy thing!

'Tis woven of ray and flash and glint
Of a city near and far—
Celestial summits of form and tint
As the hopes of the sainted are.

Oh, is she the mother of soldier sons,
Or is she a childless one—
This woman telling her orisons
By the light of a fadeless sun?

A Book with a crimson mark is by
And the mark is wrought with gold;
She reads in the Page full reverently
And the words are deathless old.

Oh, mother of men, or virgin nun,
For that thy brows so shine,
Communicant with the Holy One,
Thy chamber grows a shrine!

## HEREDITY AND EGO

I with the seashell-sounding heart
Have scarcely seen a boat,
And I who tent on the plain apart
Have sight of hills remote.

Of lordly seas and mountains grand
My blood has sudden sense,
Although I live afar inland—
With sky for recompense.

My father was a sailor free,
My mother from the hills,
And hauntingly they share with me
My desert's joys and ills.

Anon the trackless sea invites,
And now the mountain wall
Has peopled all the waste with sights
I've never viewed at all .

My father rules my errant heart,
Or oft my prairie will
My mother governs, though apart
I dwell from any hill.

And yet the sweeping plain for me
With all its bending sky!
Oh, much I owe heredity,
But also I am I!

## DERELICTS

Pick-pocketed by Time of youth and power
And pride and hope they crouch 'neath Time's high tower
Of Time oblivious, striking loud Shame's hour.

St. James stands very old and very gray
And venerable on King Street's crowded way
Of shops, hotels and banks in glossed array.

The cars clang by incessant in their roar,
Hoofbeat and footfall sound forevermore
And mock with noise the Church's quiet door.

The tide pours down the panting thoroughfare,
But sweeps within the churchyard's little square
Life's derelicts that make no traffic there.

The City Hall warns loud "Keep off the grass",
No tramp on Osgoode's grounds may long trespass;
The spent may rest here, while the spenders pass.

Grey-bearded as the lichened ancient wall,
Dingy as rooks that haunt the belfry tall,
Wrinkled and seared and seamed and spent withal—

They come to sit i' the sun, from where God wot,
And where they go at its passing I know not—
Estrays—estrays—of Time and Place forgot!

Noon-shock bestirs them munch what fare they eat,
Convenient board belike the church-yard seat,
Careless of gibes from the affronting street.

Ugly in old misshapen shoes and clouts,
Unwashed, unshriven, unabashed—one doubts
If they hear how the Clock at their wan wreckage
flouts.

Ah, Time, must thou accuse, who wast the thief
That left these creatures poor beyond belief
And dead as graveyard's dead to love and grief?

Pick-pocketed by thee of youth and power
And pride and hope they crouch beneath thy tower,
To thee indifferent, crying out Shame's hour.

## SMOKING FLAX.

The erubescent flax curls crisp and dry
To spend itself in blackness where its smoke
Has spread and spired, like mortals who invoke
God's patience on man's dullness—who would cloak
Dead offerings in fires from the sky.

But not in vain the aspiring lapsing flame,
Smoke-smothered for the damps amid its fire,
Ascends thus feebly, spark-starred, high and higher,
Charring the while it leaps its quivering pyre,
Feeling for Heaven with its sightless aim.

For He Who bosomed in the boulder's breast
The spark to kindle fireside or fane
Will not, capricious, quench in high disdain
Man's smoking sacrifice of heart and brain—
Clay of his mould and to his image prest!

## DAY-LABOUR IN MOTLEY

There's a log to hew and a town to map
And a hidden star to see,
But just to jingle a jester's cap
Is the task assigned to me.

And I can ring you the chiming bells
So cunningly in tune
That the courtful, empty as painted shells,
Has each a soul full soon.

The king will grant if the beggar ask
As I mount the motley's stool
And the queen has a face that was a mask
At the coming of the fool.

For many a caper I cut in mirth
As many a thing I see,
But never you'll meet though you roam the earth,
A soul that works like me.

The poor come oft to the foot of the throne
And the rich are always by.
So mine it is to be sad alone
Though I jest for majesty

Ah, mine it is to cavort and play
Though my bauble gilt-and-red

Grow dull in my hand at the close of day
As my image carved in lead.

I bound and twinkle a figure gay,
Beneath the canopy;
But still I sit as I plot my play
With naught 'twixt Heaven and me.

For my wit is the blade that cuts intrigue
And I must wield it true.
Oh, the fool can never admit fatigue,
So much is there to do.

To one is given a trench to dig,
To one to go to sea,
But wisely to wear a motley's rig
Is the task that's given me.

# THE POET

There walketh one with wingèd feet
As gilded air he trod,
Where ninety trudge the common street
In creaking leather shod.

There stayeth one with eyes that see
Where ninety pause astare
At sign of smokeless burning tree,
Or writing in the air.

Where ninety chatter, silently
One cups a hand to ear
For Delphic rune which only he
Of all the group shall hear.

Where ninety baffled, mutely crave
A Pentecostal tongue
One passioned voice is lift to save—
One soul like largess flung.

Where ninety heavy pilgrims plod,
Dull-browed, with clumsy feet,
The Poet, 'ware of man and God,
Comes singing up the street.

## "WORDS"

(From the Poet's Standpoint.)

As dolphins love the wave and hawks the air
And moths the light and, blindly, moles the earth,
So have I loved the element of Words.
I have disported in their deep-piled sea,
Breasted and breathed their tingling atmosphere,
Singed my befeathered wings in their fierce heat,
Groped God-ward for their fountain when words failed.

I can build palaces with chiselled speech,
With words e'en empty emulate the guile
Of tinkling cymbal and of sounding brass
Which, freighted, shame the music-laden reed
And beggar the mood-mastery of strings.
I've painted with rich language, framed sweet forms.
Words are my bricks, notes, colours, marble, clay!

Canvas and paint are feeble ministers
In Raphael's and Titian's high despite,
And vibrant chords are limited and frail,
Let great Beethoven murmur as he will;
The graven marble's cold though Phidias' hand
Taught fleshly beauty to defy the tomb;
For Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, wrought in words!

What harp can wring the spirit like "farewell"?
What picture speak like "perish" of the void?
What dazzling image of the sculptor's grace
Beatify like "beauty," "youth," and "love"?
Art's mightiest instruments—her more than tools,
To which earth, water, firmament and flame,
World-elements, give place—are sovereign words.

For "peace" once spoke prevailed upon the sea;
When Hebrew lips breathed "Mizpah" the wide air
Denied its altitude, its breadth of space;
Hot syllables consumed as at a breath
Belshazzar and his sin-besotten realm;
And when I burrowed Silence toward a Voice,
It rang, "In the beginning was the Word!"

## THE PRESENCE.

(As claimed by Sir Oliver Lodge.)

"We'll all come home for Christmas," Raymond says,
The astral Raymond, he whose empty chair
Waits by the hearth this twelvemonth while his fair
And strong young frame that we were wont to praise
Tarries in France, restored to Mother Mold,
Companioning her lot in sun and cold.
For Raymond lives! He stood by me to-day,
A Presence, Raymond's, and a Voice, his own,
Framing strange converse when he made essay
To tell me how he's faring There alone;
But when he spoke of Here I understood.
"Tell mother I'll be present," sounded good!
"Expect us, greet us—sons who have been mourned.
We'll all be home for Christmas. 'Tis a shame
Some chaps will not get welcomed," so he warned.
"A common spade should get its garden name:
Fools are the grieving folk who call us dead
And nail the bars up that were down," he said.
So when they troop from crystal spaciousness,
From what close comradeship with Morning Stars,
Let all our blinds be up the day to bless
That hails the visit of these avatars
To erstwhile Home. Let upward joyous eyes
Acclaim the glory of the parted skies!

## AMONG THE LOOMS.

There is tumult, there is tumult in the boastful
Magog looms,
There is deaf'ning clash of iron in the long
vibrating rooms,
Where they crowd like angry men
Who must shout and shout again,
Who must beat upon the ear-drums their stentorian
refrain—
Labour's song.

There are rioters dismembered in each protestant
machine,
Their treadling shanks and jointed knees and crooked
fingers lean
Ceaseless clutch and pass and tread—
Whose the hard-won daily bread,
That they ply, hie and fly in such a harried haunted
dread
Long day long?

There is gruesome, grinding triumph in the textile
Juggernaut
That long since crushed the wheel and loom within the
weaver's cot—
Bore down lifted arms of flesh—
Are these men the frames enmesh?

In these grumbling iron workmen do dead strikers
strive and thresh
Ancient wrong?

Grim Industry, is progress but a vampire fell that feeds
On human blood—new Magog but old Manchester and
Leeds?
Is this rumbling but the ghost
Of old issues won and lost?
Or is Labour's dirge-like rhythm Manufacture's vaunt
and boast,
It is strong!

## BLOOD ROOTS

The hepatica passed like the first faint breath
Of Spring on a hostile day;
But the breath was life and underneath
The Earth that was strewn with the forms of Death
Said, "Lo, I live alway!"

And a great pulse throb from her quickened heart
Surged warm through her members chill,
That up through the matted leaves did start
Buds white as the gone snow's counterpart,
Ten thousand on the hill.

Like the fingers of prayer tip-closed they stood,
Then opened to the sun;
And each bud offered in ardent mood
A heart in the sun's own image good—
Earth's tribute every one.

For the root of each was red as the comb
Of the cock that crowed anon,
As the squirrel frisked in the door of his home
And a robin whistled of joy to come
And by-gones all by-gone.

Ten thousand buds ecstatic spread
As Earth renewed her might,
And the root of each with sap was red,
With the sap that was blood each root was red;
But the hill was clothed in white.

## RE-NAMING BLEEDING-HEARTS

Who named the bleeding-heart?
For not at all
These fairy rosy bangles know the art
Of shedding sorrow from each dripping point
That honey-dews, not drops of blood, anoint.

I'll call the bleeding-heart
A name more gay—
"Fay-lantern"—for to play a festive part
Elves strung them so upon a night in June,
When fairies danced and gnats zig-zagged in tune.

Two spiders stretched two ladders for the elves
That lit the ball,
And many-eyed, kept watch beneath, themselves,
While light on light appeared within the bower
Each fairy lamp at morn to be a flower.

And so I give the bleeding-heart a name
That likes me more—
"Fay-lantern", for just once by moon I came
Upon that revel underneath the bush
When flowers by day were lanterns in the hush.

## TO ROSES IN OCTOBER

O Beauteous Ones, why tarry you
Though scatheless yet of wind,
Though frosts be loath to harry you
And autumn winds be kind?

O Beauteous Ones, why not away
When every bird is flown?
Or lacked you wings, or willed you stay
To meet the rack alone?

The wet hath dewed each scented cheek
As when the year was young—
Or, be these beaded tears that speak
Of 'bodings you among?

O Beauteous Ones, a step of stealth
Approacheth whiles you wait.
Bestow those petals, hide that wealth,
Before it be too late.

## BREAST-FEATHERS

In the savannahs of a western plain
I found breast-feathers pitifully torn.
The bird that suffered if alive or slain
Left but this whitest trophy browned with stain
That had been crimson, on the tell-tale thorn.

But they were soft and wonderful and fair!
What was the heart they covered? Did a brood
Of young, confiding, wild things nestle there
When savage eyes and teeth and bristling hair
Prowled close, or thunders rumbled through the wood?

How heaved this parent-plumage, mad with fear,
Feeling that arch-fiend of hypnotic guile,
The serpent, ripple dangerously near
The nest, so well concealed, and disappear,
She anguished lest her young should peep the while?

What fell, unfeeling foe with ruthless fang,
Or claw, or weapon could so perpetrate
A crime against Love's image; joy that sang
Rend from its feathered chamber; bear the pang,
Guilt's own, of spoiling Beauty God-create?

Ah, there's the ancient quip that Nature hurls:
Her civil war! If Hunger's circumstance,
Brutality, or Mischief dyed these pearls
Of breast-down ruby that yet gently curls
Bird-like within my palm, God knows
perchance.

## THE PROTOTYPE OF THE GROVE

Steadfast and patriarchal 'mid thy flock
Of sons arboreal, nursling, sapling, tree,
To breeze and tempest lending equal mock
Thou overspann'st the unstable greenery.

Thy boughs uplift, as Moses on the height
With upstretched hands plucked mercy from the sky
On weakling multitudes, thou rear'st thy might
To shield the frailties of this company.

Only, unwearied looms thine unctuous form,
Earth-rooted, Heaven-invading Parent Tree,
And all the grove's light tribe in sun and storm
Is three times blessed prototyped in thee.

# DE GUSTIBUS

That old musty cheese that we are.—THOREAU.

Forsake the peopled town, Thoreau,
And live in the wood like apes
You doubtless sprang from, chattering so,
But I've a friend like grapes!

Go hug the silences, Thoreau,
And if you can forget us;
But ere you do I'd have you know
The chum I greet like lettuce.

You call folk "Musty cheese," Thoreau,
Green-jaundiced of complexion—
I love a maid like apple-snow
And take profound exception.

E'en Socrates, the sage, Thoreau,
Declared Xanthippe's level
Bread-with-the-bran-left-in-the-dough:
His due unto the devil.

So Wordsworth, Christ, and every mind
That taught the world aright
Chid not the taste of humankind
But cured the appetite.

## THE GHOST OF STEPHEN

(The Stranger Sees the Island Apparition.)

"Say now, good nurse, what face went by
Blown round with ruddy hair?"
Her hooded cheek was white as frost,
"Doctor," quoth she, " 'twas Stephen's ghost—
Stephen that slew the paramour
Of the lady he long since loved and lost,
The loveliest maid on Pilley's shore
Though false as she was fair.

"Blithe fisherman, brown as a weathered sail,
In a flutter of red-gold locks,
He ranged the sea like his cabin floor
To the whinnying wind, or the thickening roar
Of slob on the Banks, and the iceberg's track,
From the north-most stream to the Cove's front door,
He crossed with laughter, faring back
With spoil to his homestead rocks.

"He saw and loved white Alice O'Flynn
And won her for an hour,
Ere the dark philanderer, Ormand Brent,
Drank up the goblet of sacrament
At a single quaff and, satisfied,
Bestowed light kisses, laughed and went

From the lady who wept and waned and died
As passes the bee-spoiled flower.

"So, Stephen spreading his toils to sun
Heard whispered, 'She is dead.'
And a dull-red fire kindling slow,
Blood-shot his eye, vein-fraught his brow,
Inflamed his cheek beneath its tan—
By the seething shore one saw him go
Like Doom on the track of Guilty Man,
In an aureole of red.

"The nets of Stephen rotted and blew
To tags on the storm-flung rain.
His quest fulfilled, in a darkling cove
The Avenger and Guilt for a moment strove
And one was done to quivering death;
But the Fury who struck in the name of Love,
Though he quelled his foe like a furnace-breath,
Himself came not again.

"Or he comes as you saw," said the Island nurse,
"Blown round with tawny hair."
Sidelong I glanced at the window-pane:
The blank night, eyeless, stared amain,
The hospital shrank more close in space,
But the step outside was a rush of rain.
My grog was real and worth a grace
And I sat in a firm arm-chair."

So Pilley's Island hugs a haunt
And peopled is its dark,
For all of the cross on the village church
Where the buccaneering sea-birds perch
In sudden shuddering piety
When Stephen walks and the billows lurch
And the one dare-devil boat at sea
Rides lone as Noah's Ark.

## THE HEALING OF THE LEAVES

The nurse and She and I, the Guide,
Pressed through the umbrageous forest wide
Of northern Canada to find
God's healing for the afflicted mind
Of Genevieve, the beautiful,
Whose voice in every wayward lull
Of murmurous branches fitful strayed,
Now pealing laughter, now afraid,
Now casting fragments to the wind
Of songs of her forsaken kind.

And she would raise her ranging eyes,
Star-lovely, to that Bridge of Sighs
'Twixt trouble and tranquillity,
The pine-top, sigh herself and see
Ghost phials pouring potions rare
Of grace adown the scented air;
Or sit, thought-empty, underneath
Some woodland creeper's pendant wreath,
Finger its verdured twine and feel
Strange virtue through her members steal.
Hard maples turned delivering keys
In locks wherewith her mind's disease
Had made her brain a prison-house,
Bidding the huddled captive rouse.
And apostolic unctuous hands
The chestnuts of those wooded lands

Laid on her shade-beleaguered brow
That is so calm and thoughtful now.
For Genevieve, the nurse and me
(So honoured for the Cherokee
That pulses darkly in my veins)
Lay healing in the timber plains.
From fronded fern to varnished oak
The foliaged fluttering forest spoke
Physicians' counsel wordlessly,
By each wise shrub and prophet-tree.

And she, the sick, now well and wise
But yesterday with shining eyes
Repeated how an olive-spray
Of dripping green in Noah's day
Was peace's herald to a world
Fresh to its destiny unfurled,
Purged of its sickness mightily
By the all-covering, fateful sea.
"Strange, too, that calm the groves restored
In gardens where our suffering Lord
Took his tormented weary brain
For soothing time and time again."
She paused, then mentioned quietly
The apocalyptic wondrous tree
That rears its life-bestowing stem
To bless the New Jerusalem.

I wondered if the speaker knew
How leaves had kept their office true.

## THE ORCHID HUNTER

Pagan and pleased I ranged the Panic wood
Betwixt pine-pillars holding up that dome
Whereunder men have worshipped since the Dawn,
Where every knoll the foot-path chanced upon
Entreated homage like that fabled home
Of gods, Mars' Hill, where God's strange altar stood.

A cataract at hand with crystal cup
Poured out libations, myriad psalteries
Of bird-notes spilled sweet music from the loft,
Leaf-curtained, all the while the vestments soft
Of unseen vestals trailed among the trees
And incense from their censers quivered up.

Yet 'twas in joy not reverence I trod,
Clove through the thicket's armèd ranks of thorn,
Undid the withewood's tangle, left the spoil—
All gold— of barren's heather for the soil
To gather, blew Childe Roland's charmèd horn
Before the Gates of Faery— gods for God.

When flashed a fane before the infidel,
Paused in its passing Glory's garment-hem!
The Unknown's altar imaged in a flower—
A shrine that had been bright beside the tower
Of rosy sunset— gleamed upon a stem,

Earth-anchored, where Love's fairest self might
dwell.

I caught and kissed the fluttering fringe of grace,
Shed tears upon the cushion of the moss
Where, kneeling, virtue ran in all my veins
At that great touch of jacinth drenched with rains,
That presence whorled with petals like a cross,
Pure as Shekinah in an holy place.

Grail-like the pitcher shone amid its rays,
Love's quintessence no bigger than a hand,
Holding within its compass as the pink,
Wet-gleaming shell upon the murmurous brink
Of ocean cups the deep, sky, sea and land.
I marvelled, loved and prayed and went my ways.

Since when I seek the orchid, pilgrim-wise,
In Edens serpent-haunted as of yore,
In bog, in forest, on the mountain height,
Happy but to behold these temples bright
Of Goodness, worship, bend the knee before
Creation's ark of shining mysteries.

## DEMETER IN NOVEMBER

Her fingers pluck at the window-ledge—
Demeter's, come like a graveless ghost—
They pry and pluck like a rifting wedge
And she calls with the voice of the wind in sedge,
"Persephone—lost—lost!"

The Mother of Earth grew crazed o'ernight—
Demeter roams November-tossed—
And her hair, erst twined with wheat-ears bright
And poppies, is rent as she seeks in fright
Persephone, her lost.

The flowers of all the earth are dead,
Transfixed and grey and rimed with frost,
And its heavy corn is harvested—
Demeter shivers and shrieks in dread,
"Persephone is lost!"

Has the scythe then circled thy fairest child,
Demeter, and is thy questing crost,
That thou go'st with mien so changed and wild?
Is thy daughter by Death or Life beguiled,
Persephone, thy lost?

In at each curtain she peers and raves,
Now here must pause, now hence must post,
Then speeds to the ocean to scan the waves,

Or hastes to her furrows that gloom like graves—
Persephone is lost.

Athwart the rain and the riven cloud
Demeter, gone like a driven ghost,
At window of cot or castle proud
Is wailing low and is calling loud—
"Persephone—lost—lost!"

## BY THE UTTERMOST GATE

Out of the north came a Wind, and it roared:
"Behold I am feathered in snow,
From the wastes that are ice where no wing ever soared
Save my own am I come full blow!

"For the great auk turns back at the circle I pass
In my sweep from the farthest Pole;
And the green berg's bear is a ponderous mass
Of white with a shrinking soul.

"But I rush forth from the Uttermost Gate
Of the glittering creaking North,
With never a thing of the Lord create
So bold as I rush forth.

"That Gate is a fierce and holy door
With living flame for bars,
That round it seven leagues and more
The sky is wiped of stars.

"The lithe flames flash like the crossing swords
Of Eden's guarded gate
And the majesty of the Lord of Lords
Seems just beyond to wait

"But never I pause for beast or bird
As those confines I cleave
Save once I stayed for a cry I heard
Would any iceberg grieve.

"The cry came forth from a dusky blur
On the lamellated ice
And my speed discovered the tumbled fur
Of the Thing that had called me thrice.

"But still it lay as I sobbed and plied
My all-too-icy fan,
So still by the Gate that no more it cried—
And the Thing in fur was a Man!"

# Maternal

## ON THE THIRD DAY.

(A Hospital Madonna Soliloquizes.)

This passing strange these summer hours to lie
With eye upon the window's waving frieze
Of verdure-crowded, nest-obscuring boughs,
And hear with ear new-tuned, new melodies
Blend with that quest-cry down the corridor
That tells me I'm a mother in this house,
With Knowledge where Surmise was all before—
My first-born's cry.

Oh, tranquil hours— the doors of Pain passed through
And all the space around a garden fair,
With blooms new-found and fragrance limitless!
Who tarries by the Gate when flowers rare
Invite with passion-buds beyond to cull
That spread, swift-plucked, like suns that chase distress
And fear, bring day for night— sweet miracle—
And dreams make true?

One bud my hand possessed when breathing first
My babe's cry tingled— such a starry flower!
A second mystic aster petalled wide
When that we called him "Son," and that rife hour,
His first upon my breast, or star or sun
I know not rightly, but it bloomed to hide

That wicket the madonna may not shun,
Fear-ivied erst.

My babe sleeps softly, flesh of life and love,
Won and possessed and ours for all and aye!
Joy floats fresh carols, Laughter makes mirth new,
Prayer stilling both to worshipping straightway;
For God's to thank whose Son, a little Child,
Earth-cradled lay while angels made ado
Of jubilation and his mother smiled,
With gaze above.

## AT CANDLE TIME

Not busy with the needle or the quill,
But idle-handed richly as a queen,
I'll sit this next half hour till candle-time—
The room where toys lie scattered is so still,
The sunshot leaves and tendrils are so green
Of vines that to the nursery windows climb!

I'll watch where falls their pattern light and shade
Above thee sleeping in thy downy bed,
Rosy and baby-round and wrapped in dreams;
I and the toys will watch— but I'm afraid
We have no pass to follow thee and tread
Thy poppy-fields, where one Blue Flower gleams.

Go find that blossom, darling, I will wait
With mind as vacant as my empty lap,
To see thee coming and hear thee exclaim,
"I have it, mother!" Sure a kindly fate
Will lead thee through the poppies to the gap
Where blows the bud with Happiness for name!

Or no, for I must kindle candles now
And cupboard all thy playthings till the morn
And close the twittering twilit casement up;
But when thou comest back with lighted brow
And azure-petalled trophy to adorn
*There will be water in thy birthday cup!*

For, dear, it must not wither when 'tis found,
The rare blue bud you'll find beside the gap
That leads from Gardens of Forgetfulness
To Trees of Life where mysteries abound.
When thou art gone from out thy mother's lap
Thy Blue Flower shall be lovely none the less!

## THE SICK CHILD

My child is sick, my child with the rose-sweet
body,
The bud-sweet body, dewy and fragrant and
tender;
The mouth I have kissed so oft in the midst of laughter
Is hot, is parched; and his eyes, new stars of the
morning,
Are strange in the heaven of his face, are fever-
lighted;
His shining hair, like the milk-weed silk for softness
And sheen and fineness, is tossed and dry and
disordered;
And his curving brows, like the wings of the flying
swallow,
Are drawn, are distressed, as the swallow's wings
were wounded—
Were sorely wounded, staying flight and gladness.

Where is the Evil hath stricken my child, my
cherished?
Let the Lizard crawl forth in his claws and his scale-
like armour—
Let him rear from his belly, the Worm, the Prince of
Serpents,
And grapple. And I, the child's mother, will slay,
will throttle,

Will stop his horrible breath, with my hands destroy
him!
But he hides and plies his traffic, and dares not meet
me.
My child suffers and tosses, crying faintly,
And I, his mother, must knot my hands and hear him,
Must wait and hear him, must wait and listen, tortured
Must wait while Evil works and succour tarries.

My heart drags like a stone in my rending bosom,
My limbs are lead, and my bitter, bitter anguish
Mounts like a flame that is all my life within me.
And the flame is my voice and my tears and my
burning passion
Of Love, of Hate, of Entreaty— O Almighty,
Let him not suffer, the child for whom I travailed,
Let him not wither, the Flower that I have cherished!
Show me the foe that I may fight and vanquish,
Let me find and destroy the covetous twisting Presence
Invisible, close by the cradle of my first-born.

## THE MOTHER

My heart is light because of the child
That plays before my door.
There is sun on his hair. Ah, there he smiled!
Two dimples that lurk played peep once more
In the chin up-tilted for Love's caress.
God bless!

His feet are like arrows of light that glance
On a sea in sun,
So fleet they hie, so free they dance
At the whimsical will of my little one;
So keen they pierce in elusiveness!
God bless!

A leaf winds down from my reddening tree
To brush his sleeve.
'Tis a touch from Old Mortality,
Arresting fingers that aye must weave
Their strand in the web of Happiness—
Distress.

I lock his arms about my neck
And crush him close;
But hold so frailly! Nod or beck
From behind the Curtain— straight he goes.
Oh, my prayer is the cry of helplessness—
God bless!

## RACHEL BEYOND RAMA

O Motherhood of Earth, the sword is bare—
Where is thy lamentation, voice and tears?
No angel comes to still thy midnight fears
With, "Speed thy son to Egypt, hide him there."

Herod's red ghost is out with fire and sword
And men, not babes, must seal his ghastly tomb;
The first-born and the last-born of thy womb,
Their blood of life like wine must be out-poured!

Where is thy noise of weeping, Rachel-heart,
That inly bleeds with every mortal stroke
That falls upon thy children? Rama woke
To sobbing 'neath her monster's bloody smart.

Where is grief's agitation in this land
Of mothers robbed of grown but cherished sons?
'Twould seem the tide of mourning silent runs
As through the narrowed Hour-glass sand on sand!

Like sand on sand dark woe adds ruth to ruth;
But Rama lies long centuries behind
And agony to-day has drawn a blind
Where Rachel fain would screen her passion's truth.

O Motherhood that sorrows without plaint,
The Fountain reached, the pitcher and the cup
Are idle vessels: thy bruised heart held up,
The Spring will comfort that thou shalt not faint.

Rachel that wailed in Rama by the gate,
Lets fall her tears now secret in the night,
Mourning her sons, grown heroes in the fight!
Rachel must weep, but is not desolate.

## AT THE FOUNTAIN

O Crystal River, fill my water-skin.
My child's eyes thirsting seek my face,
As the drinking-cup is lifted to the pitcher.

Grant the draft I pour be deep and fleckless;
May it be cool as grotto-lilies;
Let it delight like guileless ruddy wine.

My child has eyes wherethrough look seraphim.
Draw I for angels' chalices?
My child cries "Tell me. Tell me. Tell me." ever.

O Crystal River, fill my water-skin,
For my child's eyes thirsting seek my face.
The drinking-cup is lifted to the pitcher!

## EMBRACES

I breasted water plush as air
Beneath a kindly sun,
Felt it adown my arms so bare
Like liquid zephyrs run;
But southern water, limpid, mild,
Was rough to thee, enfolded child!

I gathered flowers in a sheaf
All feather-soft and cool
And smiled with pleasure past belief
To feel them wonderful.
But petalled treasures ne'er beguiled
My arms like thee, enfolded child!

I clasped thee to my bosom warm,
Body and soul of thee,
And all my being quaked with storm
Of subtlest ecstasy.
My heart was passionate and wild
Holding thee so, enfolded child!

# Descriptive

## THE RIVER MEANDER

There's a river as long as the fabled way
To Tipperary Town
Where a boat may loiter the live-long day
A-drifting softly down.

A-drifting down through parted reeds
Besprint with iris blue
And lilies white and water-weeds
Of gold-and-garnet hue.

Green dragon-flies spread glancing wings
Ashine with colours seven,
And butterflies, elf-painted things,
Alight and flit to heaven.

The dappled sky's an azure flood
And the river like a cup
Is full of sky, as a vintner good
Had lately filled it up.

And the floating clouds in the stream are deep
As the heavenly tufts are high.
They sail and sail with brooding sweep
Like white swans drifting by.

Save here where the bank casts sudden shade
And the river-bed grows rock,
And a dusk of the glooming branches made
Has blotted out the flock.

Instead, the little silver fish
In crescent curves leap out
And a fawn as close as heart could wish
Uplifts a startled snout.

A heron winks, one-legged astream,
Whilst jenny-wren coquets
With a blackbird brave in gilded gleam
Of scarlet epaulettes.

And a porcupine, that was a nose
That drew a rippled fork
Of the river, is drying out his clothes
There, rattlingly at work.

Oh, the river is only a modest flit
Of the crow from spring to lake,
But it's many a mile if you follow it
For old Meander's sake—

If you follow it, twist and turn, a day
In a vagabond canoe,
If you follow it Stream Meander's way
As an idler ought to do.

## NOON DAY ON LAKE ONTARIO

The sun strode laughing through the unguarded
heavens,
His darts that dealt mortality but yesterday to
the clouds,
Now idle, sportive, he shook at the fugitives herded on
the horizon,
Fainting afar to the limbo of forms forgotten.
Oh, fiercely merry he rattled his half-full quiver
And into the sea-broad Lake, a sapphire fable,
He spilled ten thousand arrow-heads of glory.
So quenched he his ire and took his Victor's pleasure.

I saw the Lake leap up like Love's quick bosom,
At every barb's keen point a mortal splendor—
A wound, a star, a diadem of rainbows!
Ten thousand pangs the ecstatic water suffered;
Ten thousand shafts rained down through panting
ether.
So marched the Conqueror-Wanton through his zenith.

## SIESTA

The fields are poppy-vaporous, the wind's a
feather fan
And Morpheus puts his charm upon the Hours'
caravan
Who pause in full procession to hear his faery rune,
Falter, forget and sleep upon the breast of afternoon.

And all the South is captive, too, in flowery chains of
sloth,
The butterfly is motionless, the burning tiger-moth
Sleeps deeper in the passion-flower's pendulous
festoon,
The bee's gold thigh grows leaden 'neath the spell of
afternoon.

All pilgrimless the panting road that toiled to meet the
sky
Has found a cloudy pillow and is dreaming blissfully;
The sluggish river glides to sea and to its sleepy tune
My eyelids yield, enchanted by the drowse of
afternoon.

Oh, sweet the long siesta where the Solomonic ant
Has ceased from troubling dozers with its energetic
cant,
Where the Tent of Dreams is shifted from the
slumberer too soon
Who eats the lotus-berry of the tropic afternoon!

## THE ORIOLE

I saw flame on a smoky wing—
They called him Oriole—
But when I heard the phantom sing
'Twas Liquid-Fire's soul.

Oh, each note, a flashing spark
Of music, flew to drown
In song's cascade, against the bark,
That brightly twinkled down!

The sprite glanced at shuttle-pace
Amid the apple-bloom
And drew behind his burning grace
A filament of gloom.

A drenched bough extinguished him
Where swung that mossy hole,
His nest, with fledglings at the rim,
To quench Sir Oriole.

But live flame is living glee—
The gay paternal elf
Sparked on about the family
That glorified himself.

I am Medusa, the serpent-tressed.
My glance is mortal. My hissing curls
I toss, and the towering factory furls,
Or the forest withers and writhes distressed.

I am the Gorgon, tawny-locked,
That stalks by night in frenzied lust;
That feeds unsated leaving dust
For flax or flesh consumed and mocked.

I am the Fury, One of Three
Snake-crowned that own the Serpent lord,
Whose seething crests but bide his word
To scatter woe impartially.

I am the Fiend of the twisting hair,
Whose gaze transfixes, whose scorching breath
On fair or foul is the bite of Death,
For I strew the foul as I foul the fair.

I am Medusa, viper-rayed.
I rage, I raven, I glut my fill—
I follow my own and my Master's will
Till Earth recoils and Man's afraid!

# BARK

Green leaves are beautiful in sun and shade
Spread, each, and fluttering like a fairy fan
Fit for Titania when her caravan
Had clashed with Oberon's train athwart the glade.

But I would sing the loveliness of bark,
The cryptic sheath of trunk and bough and twig;
Barbarian mouth that spouts the whirligig
Of fountainous green aloft in sheen or dark!

I've stroked the stems of trees with charmèd hands,
And this was satin like a dryad's cheek,
And this had scales like armour, braided meek
Like Minnehaha's hair, another's bands.

The birch stood white as Una in the wood;
Othello-dusk the acacia's fluted form;
And here a pine-Laocoon bore the storm
Of coilèd onslaught, ivied red as blood.

Small house-doors sweet that ever open stood,
The very holes that marred the sharded trees;
Safe sanctuaries from snow, snug treasuries
For guileless Ali Babas of the wood.

Then saw I Egypt in the enchanted grove
Where each time-harried obelisk of oak
Spelled out against the spoliating stroke,
What legends in what characters of love!

What vanished tribes of folk with mailèd wings
Grooved their fleet histories in the runic bark!
Lo, not a tree in all the umbrageous park
But bore the record of their wanderings!

Wood-peckers haunt these hulks like argosies
Despoiled by red-fezed, roistering buccaneers—
Is it their drum, or Drake's, the coppice hears?
My gray-boled elm, or golden Spanish Seas?

A velvet, foliate fungus, sunset-bright,
Shone like a lantern in the shadowy mart
Of lichens' gold-and-silver, rich apart
From jade-and-emerald mosses' jewel-light.

But hallowed was the spot where greensward swells
Altar-wise upward to a sycamore—
A tryst-tree—where some lover years before
Carved out two bark-enshrinèd syllables!

# War's Aftermath

## THE INTERCEPTING SPARK

One chap had seen General Mercer, with his aide-de-camp by his side, crossing a fire-swept field, deliberately stop in the middle of it to light his pipe.

Everybody agreed that the General was the coolest man in sight that day. The aide himself assured me that it took several matches to light the pipe and that the matches were the slow-burning variety; he said that it seemed to him to have taken about an hour to light that pipe and all the time he was wishing himself in the shelter of a ditch. It had not been mere bravado on the General's part, but a deliberately planned act to steady his men. —*News Story.*

*I only have to shut my eyes to see the bandaged head*
*Of "Dickie" fresh from reeking Ypres, his one eye seeing red,*
*His tongue unloosed—a raconteur to hear and hear again,*
*Once heard, up-piling glory to his country's fighting-men.*

Quoth he: "The coolest man that day (I had it from his aide
Who wished himself a mole or hare he was so d—— afraid)
Was Mercer, tow'ring statue-still, a blinking match in hand,
The fight-glow on his weathered cheek. Men thrilled to see him stand!

"The lids were off inferno, but he paused in open
field
And lit his pipe, thrice lit it, while the earth heaved up
and reeled,
And heaven crisped like parchment on a blasting
Judgement Day—
*And the Huns had only Canada between them and
Calais!*

"You know, the gas fumed mountain-high, all yellow-
green and brown;
It caught the Allies unawares. We gasped like men
who drown.
The Turcos shrank like troops of leaves before a
blighting frost
And broke. Our men filled up the breach— we know
now what it cost!

"Shells screeched, and shrapnel bounced like hail, the
serpent-woods spat red;
The living fought like spectres, strangely tall among
the dead;
Yet there shone Mercer's match and bowl as at his own
hearth-side,
That every man who saw it kindled hot with racial
pride.

"They say there was a chap in Greece who stole
Hephaestus' coals
And fired up the human race to be more worthy souls;
Where Mercer got his lucifers let advertisers tell,
I only know he struck a light to thwart the smiths of
hell.

"Ah, deem not our Commander but a braggadocio;
The fellows tell a better tale who saw his pipe aglow!
That smoke was censer-holy 'mid the fireworks display
Of Satan at his revels and the Kaiser at his Day.

"Its light was white as tapers and as red as sacrament—
A flame of hero's heart and soul in quiet passion blent.
The man shone High Exemplar of the grace of keeping cool
And drilled us little-boys-at-war in Valor's Upper School.

"Each man caught fire, became a brand, touched up the conflagration
And spent himself— a vital spark of glory to his nation;
For we scorched and singed the Boches and they say we saved the day
When Canada was all between the Kaiser and Calais!"

*So Dickie wound his story up, the while I dressed his head,*
*Poor Dickie, gassed and gashed and game! I see him on his bed,*
*A turkey-cock with one good eye and half a smile to boot*
*Cut off midway by bandages. Those Huns know how to shoot!*

## REMEMBERING McCRAE

Red poppies ne'er again shall fan
My spirit to forgetfulness,
What though their fumes since Earth began
Breathed sloth and slumber passionless.

No matter what the garden's grace
Where she unveils in charmèd air,
Each poppy lifts a haunting face
That I have seen somewhere— somewhere.

Can one forget the flowery field
Where, speaking yet, dumb lips of clay
Shout challenge? Can the poppy yield
Nepenthe to the name "McCrae"?

Oh, fringèd mentors, fan for aye
The flames of memory and of pride!
Like Vestal virgins feed alway
Love's altars for our brave who died.

## THE CITY OF LOST LAUGHTER

The people here (Courtrai) have suffered too much to have any complete reaction, yet some of them called out 'Good Morning!' and all their men doffed their hats to us, but with a gravity and a kind of dullness like people who had long been stunned by misery. —*Philip Gibbs.*

Roubaix sang and Lille rang in our triumphal way,
At Tourcoing the dying year sat up with eyes of May,
We entered Bruges to storms of joy with banners streaming gay——
*But the City of Lost Laughter was the remnant of Courtrai!*

Oh, four years of war tears had dried the wells of woe,
The townsfolk had no cistern left to bubble up and flow
In rainbow showers of happiness; they let us come and go
As voiceless as their belfries, struck to silence long ago.

From each dug-out they flocked about with leaden, hungry eyes,
Young children grown too old for joy at freedom's strange surprise,

The aged that could not straighten to behold the
tranquil skies,
And wondered at the stranger in the Liberator's
guise.

Deliverance disturbed their trance of misery— no
more.
Dumb sheep of slaughter, piteous beneath the axe of
war!
We trod their ways where autumn leaves lay red as
trails of gore
And listened to the echo of the dying cannon's roar.

The fiendish guns of fleeing Huns still swept the
streets with fire,
And shards of Death flew thick as rooks about St.
Martin's spire;
Joy could not make her matins heard against that
warring choir—
The mart was a necropolis, each curb a smoking pyre.

I paused beside the teeming tide that cleaves the town
in twain,
Where yesterday we British closed the Hohenzollerns'
reign,
And wept for citizens too crushed to feel or joy or pain
Who dully told me nightmare-tales and went their
ways again.

"The Prussian dread is gone," they said, "but to return, forsooth!
Old men and infants cannot fight. They've taken all our youth."
For peace was only one day old, nay, hardly that in truth,
And a thousand and five hundred days had steeped Courtrai in ruth!

The seven first who braved the worst and ranged the prison town
Were clutched by frantic hands, like straws snatched at by men who drown;
They took the pent-up welcome for the hosts in khaki-brown
Ere hope sank back to sullenness and doubt that would not down.

Oh, towns bloomed and towers boomed on our triumphal way,
And all along the dying year looked up with eyes of May——
The khaki-coats had banished all the hordes in leprous gray,
*But a city of lost laughter was the phantom of Courtrai.*

## THE NORTH SEA'S EMPTINESS

He had eyes as empty as the North Sea.— —*Chesterton.*
(A Tragedy Based Upon Facts of the Recent War.)

Poseidon needs his trident, let him smile inscrutably
At storms and wrecks! A maniac is all he's left of me.
He needs his pitchfork-sceptre when he rules the heaving sea,
*To poke the spectres under when they rise accusingly.*

The North sea
Has a masked face,
Its features dread
No man has read
Save only the dead
And me— and me!

Abysmal sphinx
And charnel place;
I know its glooms,
Its haunted rooms,
Its greedy tombs,
Like the soul that sinks.

For I was mate
(Lord lend me grace.)
On the fishing-smack,

"Audacious Mac",
That sailed in the track
Of Fate— of Fate!

A Zeppelin fell
In its fiendish race
To the Kentish coast.
'Twas a wreck at most;
'Tis a restless ghost
In the North Sea's hell!

We watched her throes
Till the only trace
That the vortex gave
Of the demon's grave
Was a wraith "Save! Save!"
That shrieked— God knows.

A waterspout
Is a commonplace
And I've seen a snake
That an ocean-quake
Compelled forsake
Its lair, but I doubt

If the sea have a fear
In all its space
More dread than the slain
Who rise again—
The dead of the main
Who re-appear.

Of the Zeppelin's crew
I pinned a brace
With the glass— mere boys:
They spun like toys
In the whirl and noise
And we— *withdrew!*

Our ears were stone
As they sank apace.
We were all too few
For that armèd crew
Whose fame we knew
From the fighting-zone.

We let them die—
'Twas not disgrace—
But a man must rave
Who has heard "Save! Save!"
And has let the grave
Reply to the cry.

And still they rise,
That populace
Of the empty sea,
To share with me
Eternally
Their paradise!

Oh, Neptune needs his trident, let him smile inscrutably
At storms and wrecks! A maniac is all he's left of me.
The lord of greedy waters needs his prongs of mastery
*To lay his victims under when they lift above the sea!*

## THERESE

A Tale of the Exodus from Lille at Easter 1916.

Ah, broken Lily of Lille, Therese,
I saw you torn away
I heard your mother's bootless pleas,
I marked your grandsire's faltering knees,
That dawn of an Easter day.

From your lace-hung room and your maiden bed
And your blushing dreams of love,
They hurried you forth through the door of Dread,
Through the streets of Shame, with your glimmering head
Strained back, in that piteous drove.

For twice four thousand delicate girls
Wound weeping through the town,
Hun-called, gun-goaded, casting pearls
Of grief 'fore the mastering swinish churls
Who drove with thrust and frown.

I saw your face like a fainting star
And your wide dilated eyes,
Your white arms lift to a God afar,
Your youth that slid— swift avatar—
Into Age in Sorrow's guise.

You passed by the velvet-mills, Therese,
And on by the bleaching-ground;
So, out where the blood of the Dove of Peace
Was blight on the flax-fields' fair increase,
In anguished train you wound.

A many hundred miles from home
What agonies were borne!
With never a laver, never a comb,
Nor roof by night save the starry dome,
You slaved in the alien corn.

Wild fear possessed your shuddering frame
In the fields of Frightfulness:
They gave you blows in the Kaiser's name;
They thought to sully your angel's fame
With the deadlier caress.

Six months you hungered and toiled and bore
Such death in life, Therese,
And told on your truss on the cloud-roofed floor,
Such tremulous pater-nosters o'er
As troubled Heaven's peace.

Then you came again, bruised Lily of Lille,
On a shivering autumn day,
So spent, so spent! I saw you reel
And fall on the door-sill, rise and feel
Through tears, your blinded way.

Your mother fingered your pallid cheek
And kissed your haunted eyes;
Choked back her grief, but could not speak.
Your grandsire cursed that Age is weak
And wept for Youth that dies.

Poor, broken Lily of Lille, Therese!
Forgiveness cannot dwell
In a heart so hurt, though songs of Peace
And carillons of glad Release
Have stilled the bruit of hell.

## THE FANFARE OF PEACE

The world sent up a shout that shivered Heaven
And clanged the joy-bells in the Towers Seven
That guard the Gate and all the soldiers brave
Who fought and died the cause of Right to save,
With angels flocked along the ramparts bright
To see the Earth-star flash a sudden light
In colours that spelt Victory and Peace
And to the bond in Christendom, Release!

The streets of Earth drew instantly more near
And drowned the choirs of Heaven in the cheer
That echoed and re-echoed through the Dome
Making the Heroes weep glad tears for home.

They saw the wave ecstatic, like a flood,
Move healingly across the fields of blood
And, like a mantle, fold around the sea,
Stilling the watery warfare wondrously.
They saw a thousand boroughs reached and lit
By all the Heaven-high iris shafts of it.

Each door and lane poured life into the street:
Hoarse men, glad women, little children fleet,
And headlong dogs that burrowed in their wake,
All out for joy and jubilation's sake.
For scarce a house in any quiet town
But lent heart's blood to put the Tyrant down

And some recalled how they completely gave—
And laid Love's pansies on a distant grave.

But every stack and spire that had a throat
Stormed Heaven with din and all the flags afloat
Made mad ado in joyous, frantic hands
To shouts and laughter and the bruit of bands.
Arms ached for tugging at the belfry ropes,
Nor heeded, while long pent-up fears and hopes
Gave place to cataracts of certain joy
That spent itself in pranks of man and boy,
In gay attire, with parasols and gauds,
And guns and effigies and smirks and nods,
And all the bright parade of happy pelf
Snatched hurriedly from cupboard and from shelf.

Old ladies at the windows smoothed their curls
And leaned forth, beaming, wishing they were girls
To jostle through the throng and laugh and shout;
And babies, wondering what 'twas all about,
Drummed on their mothers' breasts and stared and
crowed
At coloured concourse in the common road.
Some eyes looked forth, but saw not, wistfully,
And yearned for wounded boys across the sea.
And some were blind with tears for valiant men
Who, though Right triumphed, would not come again.

Yet Earth's cry reached the still, supernal Dome
And listening Heroes cheered the news from home!

# On Flying

## THE STOWAWAY

That the first crossing of a lighter-than-air ship should lack none of the excitement connected with a sea-going voyage, there was a stowaway.— *—Newspaper clipping.*

I sway, I sway,
The stowaway,
As well as the captain and crew,
In the keel of the ship that rose when Day
Was yet in sheath, in proud essay
To colonize the Blue.

In silver sheen
We slipped between
A roof and a floor of cloud
And heard far under the nether screen
Thin echoes that farewells had been,
Less loud and aye less loud.

O Loneliness,
Must I confess
Thy fear in the breast of night?
We flew a ghost of the wilderness,
With never a pin-point star to bless
The burdened eye with light.

The rolling floor
Turned o'er and o'er;
We moved before the push
Of Heav'n who kept the whispered score
Of the Flying Game for us and more
Disturbers of her hush.

We nothing spoke.
The senses woke.
The thick night oozed like tar
Between the fingers. 'Twas a joke
For gods, to hear each soul invoke
Its horoscopic star.

Then for a mock
Jove sent a shock
Of storm to flout the sky;
With lightnings played at shuttlecock.
A wren became our battle-hawk
That cowered painfully.

We ploughed the fleece
Without surcease
Till from the jagged Dark,
Like Orpheus piping the Shades to peace
For lost Eurydice's release,
The moon redeemed our bark.

Through seven rings,
Prismatic things
Slung out by the merry moon,
We leapt in our tinsel furnishings—
A circus-sprite that had found new wings
In the gas-bag's gray cocoon.

Then came the Dawn
At the clarion
Of Duty to her station;
Bade Pluto's lingering hordes begone
And spread her glist'ring hosts upon
The chasms of Creation.

So soft I slid
From where I hid
'Twixt pockets Six and Seven,
That none perceived, gainsaid, or chid,
And I was there to see the lid
Lift bodily off Heaven!

Oh, roofless height
That beggars sight!
Oh, sea without a floor!
We drew together as we might
At that cerulean panel bright,
The Universe's door!

No more alone:
To the undertone
Of engines, sun or fog,
And jazz tunes ripped from the graphophone
Each talked, or laughed, or sang, as prone
And some one kept the log.

We munched pink ham
And made salaam
Before our joint-invader
Of Space— a pond-bug boat that swam
The crinkled sea for Rotterdam—
Like Zenith's nod to Nadir.

Withal I'd quail
In hammock frail
When hollow night rolled over
And cloud-horizons told a tale
Of wrath, in fear some ambushed gale
Would rend our linen cover.

From out th' abyss,
The conquering kiss
Of Firmament to Ocean
We bore, yet moved in doubting bliss,
As air comports the chrysalis
Strange to its wings' commotion.

Flashed far beneath
The mighty wreath
Of emerald-glassy mountains,
Then spice for ice assailed the breath
As Shore shook off its Arctic sheath
And played its verdured fountains.

Then voices— folk!
Spark-stuttering spoke
The Wireless from its towers.
Field, bay and quay to cheering broke
As Triumph from her trance awoke
To smother us in flowers.

Oh, 'twas a trip
In the wonder-ship—
And none the less romantic
That I, the stowaway did sip
Elixir sweet to the captain's lip
Who bridged the wide Atlantic!

## BUG O' NIGHT

Ghost of Icarus, rise and see
This boast of Old Mortality,
Called "Bug-O'-Night" by men that ride
In wingèd, sharded, whirring pride,
On fateful mission high intent—
Invaders of the firmament.

What is this triumph, bold and new,
That drops its bolt from out the blue—
This armoured bug whose buzzing steel
Has made the world its terror feel?
And what can be the monster thing
Provokes it prove its deadly sting?

The hate that from its narrowed eye
Has struck adown the startled sky
Is fixed upon a hamlet small
Where spire-chimes to vespers call
And Age responds while Childhood sports
And Youth to trysting-tree resorts.

Its tongue has dartled lightning red:
Gaffer and swain and child are dead,
The bells are strewn that lately rung
And the shattered Cross to earth is flung,
And Bug-o'-Night of the Flying Corps
Is gloating over one exploit more!

## A FLIGHT THROUGH FABLELAND

Based on an Aerial Journey Made from Cairo to Karachi (India)

Oh, not by land and not by sea
From Cairo unto Karachi
We follow the trail of Old Romance—
Nay, blaze it, amid the dizzy dance
Of stars by night and clouds by day;
We scatter the sky in Medea's way!

Old Pharaoh sleeps with dignity
As we set forth for Karachi,
And Cleopatra lies forbid,
I guess, in a crumbling pyramid;
Only three boys and a beggar stare
At the ship we loose for the glamored air.

But the course rolls out, a glittering road
Where wheel nor keel e'er grooved its trode.
It takes the breath like an open door
That slams as we cross its threshold o'er—
Two airmen bold with a purpose old
As Daedalus' vans in the Age of Gold.

Three boys look up and the beggar begs
And we quit the Land of the Dozen Plagues;
The ooze of the inundating Nile,
The Sphinx and "the cunning crocodile"

Have shrivelled far under our gloating eyes
To mud-pie, doll and lizard size.

We fly, we fly, and the helmsman smiles
Like a glutton gulping the spicy miles.
Damascus throws up an anxious glance
As we startle her out of her midnight trance;
A buzzard beating against the stars
High over the peace of her hushed bazaars.

A few short hours and Bagdad's hive
Gapes up at her legend come alive—
A Wishing Carpet carrying two
Desire-swift through the breathless blue.
"The Devil's in it," exclaims a Turk
And he blesses himself as he goes to work.

In a twinkling Bandar Abbas slips
Mirage-like under our Ship of ships,
With all her masts of dwarfish size
To a downward glance from the swinging skies
And, pilot, I swell with the birdsman's pride
To mark them over our wingèd side.

The sea embraces Abushehr
Like a lover, 'tis sport to spy on her
Unblushing but lovely in scents and dyes
And priceless woollens, with wanton eyes
That lazily lift as our shadow blots
Her sun, unwist as the Argonauts.

In a day and a half— for Kismet's kind—
The Garden of Eden shrinks behind;
Omar's forgot and we quote Tagore
As India stretches her rolling floor,
More rich than a carpet of Karachi,
Our goal and her gate by the harbored sea.

So tread we the sky on our flying horse,
Pegasus, Pegasus,keeping the course!
In troth 'tis a 'plane, but we feel him prance
As we venture this route of quaint Romance,
Over pyramid, mosque and temple fair,
First couriers of enchanted air.

## A CONSTELLATION'S ADVENT

Written while the fate of Hawker and Grieve was yet unknown.

Where is the sky-ship, where the gallant crew,
That sped from Newfoundland but yester-eve,
Columbus-like to blaze through trackless blue
A highway to new epochs of commune
'Twixt world and world? They should be coming soon.
Where is brave Hawker? Where intrepid Grieve?

So young, so strong, so bold the adventurous pair!
Why tarries overlong the exultant car
That like an unhooded falcon took the air
In a fair weather for the sport of kings,
Set its stern beak and rattled out its wings
And fix't its eye for Ireland afar?

Green Ireland looks vainly toward the west.
Comes there no speck with triumph-broad'ning vans?
Blank, wingless, empty as a last year's nest,
Voiceless of tidings as the insensate sun
That Occident, his goal— so safely won!
Did Phoebus' car encounter hapless man's?

They meant to cross the gulf of teeming night
And hail that unswerving kingly charioteer,
Coursing the heavens by primeval right,
As fellow-princes of his wide domain.

Did they presume too richly— dare in vain?
The world's great heart is bursting with the fear.

Consult Marconi's children. Have they word—
His little pitchers with the egregious ears,
Sensitive, eager? Nay, they have not heard
Or shout or whisper from the westward void.
Let every art of search be straight employed:
"They failed" must not go ringing down the years.
Failure and Death were one unto these twain.
"Our goal or else the grave," they cried and sped
Like Triumph's swift evangel o'er the main—
The covetous Atlantic that lay still,
Astounded like a brute that feels the will
Of man laid on at last, in couchant dread.

Did the scorned ocean wait but for the night
To curl his sable lip and bare his teeth
And rally all his forces for the fight?
Did he prevail on his ethereal clan,
The Clouds, to hurl him down his master, Man,
Whilst he crouched ready, ravening beneath?
Oh, ocean cannot be their stopping-place!
Nay, nay, for I believe the garnering sky
Had need of one more glory for her space,
Like Charles' bright Wagon tethered to her poles,
And claimed the sky-ship with its starry souls
To light the firmament eternally.

## THE RETURN

Companion Poem to "A Constellation's Advent".

They have come back! The dead are quick again!
Shout, Ithaca: Odysseus has returned
To that Penelope whose faith yet burned
When the world watching wept, "It is in vain!"

Not ghosts but heroes has the abysmal tomb
Of Doubt and Dark Surmise in these up-given—
Their feet star-dusty from the roads of heaven,
Their garments mouldy with sea-bitter rheum.

In clothes, not cerements, they walk the street,
Back from that seven-days-long eternity
'Twixt chasmic sky and un-horizoned sea,
And dear as life is every soul they greet.

Oh, kindly seas of faces, hands that wave!
Oh, Lode-Star beaming in a Surrey town,
You are more precious than Earth's best renown
More fair than letters on a Victor's grave!

Yet 'twas Death's hand-clasp made Life's doubly dear.
Without that sun-high, sea-profound essay,
Earth had been earthy, people haply clay,
Hawker and Grieve but men—not these we cheer.

They have come back who crossed uncharted bars.
The dead are quick. Odysseus who was lost
Returns to Ithaca, a hero-ghost.
Britain has plucked her children from the stars!

# Tongues of Light

(A PHANTASMAGORIA IN SONG)

*The day that seven learned doctors fixed an enormous telescope on the University campus and, bat-like in vision as in habiliments, peered through it skyward toward a dimness of the Sun, in a knot of villagers following suit with fragments of smoked glass, remarked one wiseacre to his horny-handed neighbor, "Hast heard that Heber, the bard, is in a trance?"*

*Now Heber alone in the village was aware that the shadow upon the Sun which the wise had not predicted, in reality was the Sun's soul absent, even as the poet's own soul that day was absent from his body. For the soul of the Sun exulted in light and, said he, "I will now assert my kingship. Each child of Light upon earth shall declare his being: the Spirit of Moonlight, the Spirit of Starlight, Lightning, Volcanoes, the Hearth, the Glow-worm—each shall declare his soul in song before me. And I, the Sun, will proclaim my soul in song."*

*Forthwith had the mind of the poet leapt free and whilst his wife, Netta, fingered the pallor of his eyelids*

*and placed his harp at hand against his waking, and whilst his erstwhile floating hair clung like a glory furled about his temples, he sped along the Sun's glistering pathway heavens-high, beholding in space the Assemblage of the Lights, jewel-like in a universe of darkness, and heard while each proclaimed his soul in song.*

*Quiescence fell on the Lesser Lights and blindness for a space upon the poet as the Sun rose almighty from the aurora of his throne and sang forth the pæon of his spirit.*

## SUN-SONG

Splendor is mine and power and loneliness!

Hast thou not seen the gull at noon
With bill like gold and breast like snow
Up, up, through the naked heavens go
To drop light-blinded 'mid the swoon
Of heedless sun-seas soon—too soon?

Splendor is mine and power and loneliness!

Mine is that palette, the seven-ribbed bow,
Alive with colors that change and shine
On gossamer wings, on lakes divine,
On summits ruddy with painted snow,
On cities bathed in my afterglow.

Glory is mine and power and loneliness!

Do I not hold the seasons tight
In leash? Lead on the stars?
Man may have named them Venus, Mars,
Jupiter, Saturn; but I delight
To station each in the curtained night!

Splendor is mine and might and loneliness!

In wrath I scourge and pitiless beat
On the thirsting earth till it cracks and cries,
Till every cistern shrinks and dries
And grass is crisp with fervent heat
And beast and man are spent for meat.

Power is mine, yea, power and loneliness!

But yellow poppies can I unseal
With fingers subtle and sweet and mild;
Caress the limbs of a bathing child
Soft as its mother; gently steal
Through chinks of woe to help and heal.

Splendor is mine and might and loneliness!

So ride I high in glorious might,
Lonely as God who made me great,
Loneliest spirit of all create,
Splendid, exultant, I stalk the height—
First-born son of the Father of Light.

Splendor is mine and power and loneliness!

*Heaven rocked and reverberated dazzlingly to the Sun-song. Then whilst the singer put a silence upon the echoes and gathered his glory about him like an evening, his handmaiden, the Moon, arose trailing her beauty out of the thickened shadows and lifted up her voice before her lord.*

## SONG OF THE MOON-SPIRIT

Mine is the spirit of mystery,
Of tears and sweet solicitude.
The white moth hidden waits for me
To spend his life in one brief hour
Before that night-blown mystic flower
That dies in daylight rude.

I silver o'er reality.
Hast seen my foam on frail cascades?
My path to heaven upon the sea?
Beheld old ghostly histories
Breathless re-lived 'neath cypress trees
And moonstruck colonnades?

My soul in lovers' balconies
Is breathed in voiceless ecstasy
And philomel among the trees
Declares my spirit to the night—
Kindles in tearful pale moonlight
The song that voices me.

Mine is the spirit of mystery.
With bristling hair and haunted throat
The tense gray wolf-hound bays at me,
High on a rock beside the deep
Dark forest wrapped in restless sleep
He feels my spell remote.

The fugitive of the desert night
Has seen my mantle's grace unfold.
The empty desert is my delight
To people, to whiten, to glorify!
Fierce joy in the wilderness have I
Though men have called me cold!

My slave, the ocean, follows me
Watchful afar what time I turn
His bosom heaving ardently;
But all my countenance must be
Fixed on the Sun eternally.
So do I shine—and yearn!

*The singer drawing her sleeve before her features fainted into a limbo of cloud-forms and whilst the hosts of light yet listened, the void echoed her passing like a sob.*

*Then from out space behind the universal curtain passionless, eternal, magnificent and selfless issued the congregation of the stars. Together sang they as when the world was formless, declaring the spirit of starlight toward the earth. The poet as one new stripped of the flesh perceived his being swept by that chorus as harps yield to the fingers of their lords.*

## THE STARRY CHORUS

Eternal calm, supernal grace,
Sing we the kindling soul of space,
The breath of God upon the void
'Mid worlds create and worlds destroyed.
Riddle of childhood's wondering ken,
Sing we the destinies of men!
Riddle of manhood's dimming eyes.
Sing we the life beyond the skies!
Comets may pass and meteors rain,
But we and God and good remain!
Selfless and passionless, pure and far,
Tabernacles of faith we are,
Veilèd and curtained and hushed and bright,
Revealing and hiding the Lord of Light;
For priest, the abyss, for worshipper
Earth and the endless ache of her.
Poet and savage and anchorite
And child who gaze in the starry night
Hearing the silent, seeing the sealed,
Counting the countless, these are healed
Of restlessness and woe and strife,
Stilled with the deathlessness of life.
The door of David's midnight tent
With Heaven's gate makes covenant
And stars between sing far and wide
Man and his Maker unified!

Eternal calm, supernal grace,
Sing we the kindling soul of space,
'Mid worlds create and worlds destroyed
God's breath upon the insensate void!

*The chorus ceased not but became inaudible receding into the profundities of space and the sun that had shrunk in the universe of stars to the magnitude of one of its slightest members, came forth as a monarch waking and reassumed the glory of his presence; the moon that had been engulfed shone palely; and the poet trembling roused him from the spell.*

*Then came Firelight, ruddy and gentle, singing of homes and terrestrial blessedness so that the poet drew nigh to warm his hands. And Firelight sang as it sings upon the hearth, in sconces and in the windows of lone dwellings.*

## SONG OF FIRELIGHT

Starlight sings of infinite spaces,
But Firelight, I, of mortal places—
Fanes and homes and camps where men
Love me and bid me love again,
Ashes am I when my light is done;
Ashes are they when their race is run.
Folk and faces I sing to God,
Sparks like me of the kindled sod!
Out of the heart of the rock came I.
Out of the dust came they who die.
Oh, faces friendly and faces fell,
Faces of men, I love you well!
Young choiring faces rapt, uplift;
Seamed faces where old memories drift;
Hearths encircled with friendliness;
Tapers lit where the holy bless;
Faces of sorrow drawn and white;
The face of the engineer at night;
Faces of mates in the camp-fire glow
Warming themselves in a world of snow;
A face at the window small and sweet
When lamps beam down the village street;
A painted face by the garish light
Of a gainful gate nor straight nor slight.
Oh, starlight sings of the Infinite Mind,
But I of the face of humankind—

Of fanes and homes and camps where men
Love me and bid me love again.

*Firelight small in the limitless confines of space lapsed from the flutter of its flamingo-wing-like rhythm and whilst its embers still purpled and pulsated and the poet warmed his shivering soul before them, lo the drums of omnipotent thunder and the fierce naked presence of the lightning.*

## LIGHTNING'S CHANT

The swift dread sword of the terrible Lord
Lifted to smite amain—
And man was dust with the reeking crust
Of the Cities of the Plain.

I was the angel when that swift change fell,
Sodom was great and dread.
I kindled the blight of a terrible night,
And kingdoms proud lay dead!

The swift dread sword of the terrible Lord,
Cycles I circled his throne
And wherever I smote from that height remote
The prey of his wrath lay prone.

Ere Might repented his anger vented
On Frailty mortal and low
And his sword forsook for a pruning-hook
To make his tree to grow.

'Twas one with a key laid hold of me
And dragged me from the sky,
Taught me the path that thraldom hath
And the irk of slavery.

Yet fierce I leap when man's asleep
To ravage and smite and slay,
While thunders beat my crazed retreat
From Peace-and-Order's sway.

Oh, I was the sword of the terrible Lord;
But bent is his blade of blight,
As you read in the book, to the pruning-hook
That trims his tree of Light!

*The drums of thunder resonated and Lightning concluding his savage chant wlth fiery coruscations was gathered back to the cities of his toil. "So have I seen a barbarian prince led captive", mused the poet and whilst his yet bedazzled vision repeated the pinnacles limned on the dark by lightning, lo, northward a presence quickened, fantastic, colorful, magical, elusive and glorious as a thousand dawnings magnified and beatified into one—the Northern Lights. And thus sang.*

# THE AURORA BOREALIS

Ice hath a halo and cold a crown
Where Phœbus forgetteth his going down
To sue at a portal sans bolt or lock,
To wait without while the echoes mock
The voice of his bidding, the lordly knock
Of the sceptre of his renown.

I am a queen and an angel bright,
The glistering bride of the Arctic Night.
Swart is the face of my chosen lord,
With terrors masked, with passions scored.
Ice-fields quake at his whispered word,
But I break forth in light.

When Phœbus has left my stubborn door
And my dark love doth stand before,
Breathless a moment yet I hide,
Then flinging my emerald portal wide
Glide forth to his breast and his cry "My bride,
My bride forevermore!"

Only the bold of the sons of man
Have gazed on my marital caravan
Possessing the heavens, though bear and auk
For ages have stared at the glory-shock
Of my door flung wide to my bridegroom's knock,
Betrothed since earth began!

Ice hath a halo and cold a crown
Where I flutter the hem of my bridal gown.
The moon and the stars in their tents of light
Pale as I pass in my garments bright,
But glad is my husband, the Arctic Night,
In the palace of his renown.

*The singer failed like an apparition through the veil of which in the last mist of its visibility the voluminous throat of a form like a volcano poured rumblingly forth its lurid chanson. Head and shoulders above the abyss and elbows wide on the wall of nether chasms, the giant flung back the plume of his pride and stormed the upper vault with his song of terror.*

Destruction is my name,
My veins are wrath,
My hour knows no shame
Save aftermath.

Stained is my vengeful hand,
My eyeballs red;
Prepared my firebrand
For quick and dead.

Beneath my smouldering trance
Lie cities deep,
Scorched by my fevered glance
In fitful sleep.

The torch of Doom, I smoke
Keeping my station
Till Man and Time evoke
Earth's consummation!

*Long did the echoes assail the universe fainting at last in the purlieus of blank Nothing when Heber perceived a commotion of light points as though some far-off nebulæ of the heavens were suddenly near without increase of size. And the bard remembered the marshes of the earth, fairy o' summer nights with*

*fireflies, and knew that a swarm of the little light-bearers had arrived to do the bidding of the Sun-god.*

*But vainly the ears of the poet were strained to catch the delicate chime of their choric psalm for so faint was its voice within the gulf that Heber, yielding to the impulse of long habit, sang forth the unheard sweetness for them. And this was Heber's.*

## SONG OF FIREFLIES

Spray of the moon
By the pale lagoon,
Fireflies start
Where the rushes part—
Fireflies, moon-sprinkled, kindle and pass
Thorough the maze of the lush morass.

Dust of the Sun
Though day is done!
Feeble and fey
Glimpse whither away
The little winged brethren of Phœbus-o'-Might,
Children, like him, of the Father of Light?

Frail fluttering spark
'Broidered bright on the Dark,
Your burden is slight
As the bearer of light;
But great is your beauty albeit a quip
From Him with the finger of hush on his lip.

For why should just you
Of the shining hosts who
Have comforted space
With features and face
Have will to direct you and wings to sustain
When Suns may not swerve from their path and remain?

E'en lightnings that scorch,
E'en Vesuvius' torch,
Flare forth to return
Though they struggle and burn
The bosom that hides them to flee and resist
Fast manacled to the Omnipotent Wrist.

But fireflies flit
And the marshes are lit
Here, there, by and yon,
Lamps tingling and gone
While stars keep their stations and garland the night
Free, free little sons of the Father of Light!

*Then it was that as Netta stood by, Heber fumbled for his harp above his pillow and, flashing his lighted eyes upon her countenance, his dream and his reality joined hands melodiously while they, the wise of the University, by candle-light made crooked marks on parchment.*

# Christmas

## THE GLORY OF A NIGHT

A profoundity waits in the infinite, wherein abide the creatures of God which yet are uncreated. Petals were there ere they yielded the scent which wastes not though they blossom in a desert. Wings of unthought brilliancy are sheathed there, biding their hour to make His sport in places imaged only, yet unmade. Mountains, embowelled yet, rest in that mighty compass; and unborn seas! And Adam, the red clay like to us though unlike, to be proof against a fall, is Possibility crying there, "How long wait I existence?" In which abyss a clod hung, void and shapeless.

"Be a star!" The Omnipotent Will exulted. "Be a star!"

The clod trembled, its veins ran fire, it blazed till every planet was wan, by and in farther distance; then yielded its frame to the Palm that plucked it forth with unscorched fingers. "Be a token"—so willed the Creator—"hang thou a space near earth. I hurl thee down. This ere I snuff thee out. My Son is born!"

The elder stars strained in their rings at this Almighty word, with vibrant rhythm, and all their ordered worlds sang in accord, "Hosanna!" Comets, hoary with æons of haste, came swinging in their orbits; swerved while the miracle burned by, consuming flight toward Earth; then swept to join the passionate chorus of the spheres.

Magi upon their way beheld a sign. It discovered to their ken where a Young Child lay, hard by stalled beasts. Above, a Virgin's eyes. About, effulgence that rose in waves and met, midway, the beams of that new star. The shaft was peopled with angels' smiles, their hands' beatitudes, their lips that moved with singing, strong, but not for ears of mortals—until the floor of heaven broke with the weight of leaning seraphs, thronging to look forth.

The air was quick, on a sudden, and rife with song. Shepherds were frighted on the pale Judean hills, unmindful even of timid lambs that bleated to be carried, had roused the town but for the spirit's arresting voice and comforting "Fear not!" And then they hasted with crook and staff and bowed their simple hearts before the Manger—offered their gift in the midst of myrrh, and frankincense, and gold the Magi brought.

The shepherds worshipped the sleeping Child, the Wise Men worshipped, the mother prayed; the angels in farthest paradise rained down their adoration. And

God on His throne sat motionless. In that swift hour, His universe—was it but Bethlehem—one little white-walled town with cypress spires? Haply 'twas so to the angels. But God said: "He shall redeem my creatures—my One Son!"

Then High God reached and took His star, spilled out its light, and tossed it to the void. Foul fiends upon their mischief, blind to light, perceived the falling of the finished husk; they fled; they troubled hell, telling their Prince: "He's come—Emmanuel!"

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